

# VIREYA VINE

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FOUNDATION

R.S.F. PO BOX 3798, FEDERAL WAY, WA. 98063  
E. White Smith, Editor

From Dan Tyson  
Dear Vireya Vine,

Malibu, California (near Los Angeles)  
November 1997

I am a member of the Southern California Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and through the Chapter met up with Fred Renich, a long time Vireya collector and grower. About a year ago Fred and I decided to team up and start a nursery specializing in several types of plants including Vireya Rhododendrons. Along the way we came to the conclusion that, time being a precious commodity for both of us (since we both work at full-time jobs) we would be better off devoting ourselves to just one group of plants and easily settled on Vireyas.

Through connections with a wholesale nursery in Moorpark that I do business with (I am a landscape contractor), we obtained permission to use a section of their large shade house for our nursery. We also use Fred's home greenhouse and shadehouse in Camarillo to the fullest. We start cuttings out at Fred's and move them to the Moorpark Nursery when they are in 6-inch pots.

The all-day sunlight at the Moorpark facility has really been good for the plants. Their growth is markedly improved over the partial day light at Fred's home due to the walls of buildings, which limit direct sunlight. Shading has been important and we have found that 63% to 73% works well for us in this climate with the plants being shifted to deeper shade toward late summer when we get lower humidity and more intense light.

Our plans are to get all of our mother-stock plants into raised beds early next year to help boost their growth and to stabilize watering. Speaking of water, we use strictly filtered, reverse-osmosis water on all of the plants.

Some of my favorite cultivars that we are growing are, Calavar, Narnia, Christo Rey, Avalon, Pleasant Companion, Rocky's Mom and R. lochiaie. Being a landscape contractor, I have come to value plants shape and health as much as the flower display in evaluating plants for the garden. The above cultivars fit these criteria along with others we are growing.

We are also exploring the possibilities of Vireyas in the floral trade and would welcome any information regarding cultivars with longer lasting flowers and/or tips on extending the vase life of cut Vireya trusses.

Dan Tyson  
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From Chris Fairweather  
Dear VV,

Beaulieu, Hampshire, England  
November 29, 1997

I have spent this afternoon sticking Vireya cuttings. Over a cup of tea I read the latest Vireya Vine. It spurred me on to give an update on the progress with Vireyas in the South of England.

Over the past few years I have been acquiring from around the world, a wide selection of mainly hybrids, plus a few species. This has been an exciting venture. Many have arrived as unrooted cuttings; consequently I have had to wait for a year or two to see the first flowers. A few like *R. loranthiflorum* have grown with great vigour but not produced one flower bud.

My aim has been to find a selection of plants that appear to be happy in our climate. So far all of the *R. lochiaie* hybrids have done well. Robs Favourite puts on a splendid show for about six weeks in the summer, along with Coral Flare, this followed by one of my favourites, St. Valentine. Littlest Angel, another *lochiaie* hybrid grows like mad but has been a bit shy with flowers. My form of *R. lochiaie* also does well each year.

From the 50 to 60 hybrids in my collection, Just Peachy has been a winner. In the gloom of winter, Popcorn is flowering now and there is a mass of flower on First Light. Oz Blumhardt's delicate Silver Thimbles is flowering and Simbu Sunset will be out in a few days. Java Light is stunning, the most intense orange I have seen, it makes an excellent standard. Hanging baskets are included in my trials, Red Rover, Littlest Angel, and Just Peachy all look good. Among the species *R. jasminiflorum* is a winner.

Currently all of my Vireyas are grown in pots or wooden tubs. I use a mixture of bark, peat and cornish grit and composted bracken as a growing mix. I find that the plants revel in the Bracken. To this I add some dolomitic limestone and osmocote as a fertilizer. Add to this the occasional liquid feed, plus an annual pinch of sulphate of ammonia and they all look splendid. I am trying a bit of supplementary light this autumn to see if we get more buds.

So that is the scene from here. Stocks are building up and I plan to prepare a list of plants for sale in 1998. I am still keen to trial more hybrids and would be delighted to purchase any unrooted material.

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*Good letter, Chris. I had the pleasure last year to visit the Fairweather Nursery and their Garden Centre. I was with Dick Chaikin and Mitch Mitchell. We were suprised with the number of Vireya plants he has and how good they looked. At that time he was growing them in a plastic hoop house. I am very pleased to know that he will have some for sale in 1998. Please send your list along Chris, to the Vireya Vine and I shall be happy to print it. We have a few Vireya people in the UK and should have more as plants become available locally. From Fairweather's we went to Exbury Gardens and wonderful, as it is, they have no Vireyas. E. White.*

From David Binney  
Dear VV,

Tauranga, New Zealand  
December 1997

This May, I had a further opportunity to collect vireyas in the wild. With two previous trips to Borneo on this occasion I decided to visit northern Sumatra. On arrival in Medan I caught a minibus direct to the market town of Berstagi - at an elevation of 4,500 ft it has a much cooler climate. The area around the town is intensively cropped but two volcanic cones - G Sibayak 7,000 ft and G Singallang 7,500 ft remain covered in native forest.

The trip up Sibayak takes 3 to 4 hours. The initial climb was through thick forest and it wasn't until the forest thinned out that I encountered the first vireyas. At about 6,000 feet *R. retusum* was growing terrestrially to about 1m on a number of exposed slip faces. A further hour on and about 500 feet below the summit the forest thinned further and rhododendrons became the dominant vegetation. There are acres of *R. rarilepidotum* with its orange / red flowers. Further plants of *retusum* were found as was *R. malayanum* and another malayovireya - ? *R. vinicolor*. The latter would be a new introduction, unfortunately only one plant was found, with no seed and Agriculture here in NZ managed to kill the cuttings.

Sibayak is an active volcano, with a sulphur filled crater and large amounts of stream spewing forth. There are three routes up the mountain and we descended by an alternative route to a little village with mineral hot pools to wash off the mud and soak the muscles.

After a rest day I headed to Kutacane in the middle of the Gunong Leuser National Park. Travel in Sumatra proved to be entertaining. Buses regularly break down, the front wheel fell off one bus but no one seemed too concerned. We just piled out and waited on the road till the next bus came along. One leg of the journey was spent perched on top of sacks of chillies on the roof of the bus. Luckily travel is slow - around 30 km/hr, though the drivers do seem to love passing on blind corners. The park is a huge area of virgin tropical forest - home to many endangered animals such as the Sumatran tiger and rhinoceros. There are two parallel mountain ranges rising to 10,000 ft with the Alas river running between. I chose to climb G Kemiri, a five day trip.

The first day was through rice paddies, coffee plantation and then into lowland dipterocarp forest. The canopy is about 100 ft above with giggers, macques crashing through the foliage. Hornbills could also be heard with their incredibly noisy flight and calls. The forest here is totally undisturbed and this made vireyas very difficult to find. Other areas I have collected have been logged or had tracks cut - both letting in light and allowing the plants to grow terrestrially.

We passed out of lowland forest through a layer of pine and eventually into the cloud forest zone. I found single plants of three vireyas on the track having fallen out of the treetops far above. None of this material has been successfully introduced and I am convinced there are many more vireyas at these lower levels. Just below the main summit ridge we entered an area of thick tangled shrubs about 20 ft tall. We stopped for a break and I climbed around these trees looking for vireyas. No vireyas but to my surprise the trees turned out to be *R. atjahense* from subsect *Irroratum*. Onto the summit ridge we climbed through 10 ft high thickets of *R. malayanum*. Rhododendrons, leptospermums, vacciniums etc. now became the predominant ridge vegetation. The light levels were much higher and the new growth on the shrubs various shades of pink and red. *R. adinophyllum* and *R. vanderbiltianum* were the commonest vireyas. Both terrestrial to 4 to 5 ft, the former with small leaves and a fine truss of 10 to 15 red tubular flowers and the latter with trusses of 2 to 3 campanulate yellow flowers.

There were two other species as yet unidentified, one with a large truss of orange red flowers - somewhere between a javanicum and rarilepidotum and a second smaller plant with trusses of 1 to 3 orange campanulate flowers. There were also some plants that were obviously hybrids of the above species.

Heavy rain prevented us from reaching the summit and marred our descent, but it was a very successful trip. Two days rest at Lake Toba followed where I collected *R. sessilifolium* from a roadside cutting and then home.

David Binney  
85 Castles Road  
RD 3, Tauranga  
New Zealand

*It is too bad when well meaning plant inspection people don't know enough or care enough to be careful with valuable plant material.*

*Many countries now look very carefully at material and if it is clean, pass it back to us in good condition. But some places have very harsh methods and often kill material. Australia and New Zealand are tough ones. Here in the US all we need is an import permit from the US Department of Agriculture, which is free and easy to write for. When you enter this country or have material shipped to you, it then only needs to be clean and free of problems. You are also allowed to carry on your person, without any paperwork, up to 11 cuttings and they will be inspected at your port of entry. From Canada you only need a Phyto Certificate and then you are home free. Saying all this is just fine. BUT, none of us wants to import a new pest problem to our country or area. Please use care and make sure material is very clean and healthy.*

From John Bodenham  
Dear Vireya Vine,

Plymouth, Devon, England  
December 1997

Winter is now upon us here in England and the greenhouse heaters are most definitely on. However, English weather changes so frequently that a constant reference to the local weather forecast is absolutely essential. Daily attention to conditions is a must. It must be good to live in places such as Hawaii where the plants are out in the garden and taking care of themselves. It is no use talking doom and gloom to such as we go about all this Global Warming business. We can't wait.

I had a letter the other day from George Argent about the well being of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Vireya collection. Evidently the Greenhouse Supervisor (and primary Vireya monitor), Paul Smith has been on a sabbatical in New Zealand at the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust garden. In his absence, plants in their greenhouse seemed to have taken a slight turn for the worse. The problem was reported as Vine Weevil. Did I have a magic cure? Unfortunately I was unable to help him from my own experiences, and I could only pass on the recommended treatment given by a commercial publication, i.e. the introduction of the biological control wasp, here known as 'Nemasys'. (I think that is the spelling) Do any of you other enthusiasts have any personal experiences to pass on? Is there anything else?

My own 'nemesis' is much more often root rot, and the best procedure I know of is to propagate as soon as possible and to pass the duplicate material to some totally remote colleague as a 'Fail Safe'. This procedure makes you feel good yourself and promotes your image with your friend also. Quite a few times I have been able to get a restart with something that would have been difficult to replace. George Argent is shortly off again for SE Asia.

Working as we enthusiasts do in a greenhouse mode rather than a garden environment, means that we seldom have the space to provide for every type of Vireya. We need to be selective and only grow the real gems. Oh! That such a selection were possible. So we give a home to all sorts of rather pathetic objects which any self-respecting nurseryman would immediately consign to the bin. I suppose this is the trait that marks us as "enthusiasts". We are the eternal optimists. For years there is hope that the plants you have cosseted all that time may look a million dollars. Pity the result is sometimes so miserable. (Sometimes I wonder why some of these things were ever passed on, even between "enthusiasts"). Perhaps a better environment would have produced a better response and the fault is mine?

Back in 1972 the late Don Stanton from Australia, distributed seed of the cross he made of *R. laetum* x *javanicum*. Over the last two weeks the six plants, now 15 years old, which I managed not to kill from this material, have flowered their hearts out. I am sure Don would have loved to see them. The tallest one is 6 feet tall and the smallest one about four feet. They are mutually different but all have delightfully orange flowers, some darker than others and one with a much lighter centre. They have given me an enormous amount of pleasure for almost three months now. The smallest of the ones to flower back in October, I just managed to get into the back of our car and took it to the autumn gathering of the local branch of the RHS Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Society. Most people thought it unreal. Lots of favourable comment was heard.

I think the members appreciated my effort, and one, who had just returned from a holiday in New Zealand, said it made his day, Vireyas are being increasingly common garden plants out there. So I felt the effort, held at the RHS Garden at Rosemoor was worth it. I took the plant there in order that friends could be exposed to and perhaps come to appreciate Vireyas which are almost never seen in this country.

The RBGE is once again putting on a Vireya display at Westminster Hall, London, at the associated Show, coincident with a Vireya lecture by David Mitchell of Edinburgh in the evening of March 17, 1998. As a RHS member, I have already sent off for my tickets. The show and lecture should both be winners.

My favorite Vireyas? As a hybrid I would so far favour Calavar, and as a species probably *R. konori*. But I am always ready to take delivery of other exceptional material to be able to compare.

John Bodenham  
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*John lives and gardens on the South West coast of England. He has a greenhouse that most of us would kill for, even though it will be too small for his needs soon. Root weevils in their greenhouse. Who ever heard of such a thing. Most root weevils go dormant during our cold winters but they stay active all winter in a greenhouse.*

*When I was at the Vireya house at Edinburgh (RBGE) a year ago I noticed that they try to use non-chemical methods to control pest. I think that is admirable of the RBGE but sometimes things get out of control and chemicals might be called for. Here in the USA we have chemicals that will control weevils and mildew if used properly. From the 'Ortho Company' I like a fungicide called 'Funginex'. The chemical name for it is "Triforine 6.5%". It is good for mildew and rust and is sold in garden supply departments. For weevils I like 'Orthene' also from the Ortho Company. The chemical in Orthene is "Acephate 9.4%".*

*Both of these products are sold to the public. I only use Orthene in the liquid format. There is also a wettable power form of Orthene but the liquid works better. The other recommended control for weevils is a special nematode that is effective on the larva of the insect. The biggest problem with root weevils is the larva stage when they eat the root system of the plant and often kill plants by girdling the stem. The adult weevil eats bits of the leaf but really won't kill the plant, only make it look bad. The biggest problem with pest control worldwide is that we all call products by different names and often don't know what the other person is talking about.*

From Leslie Riggall,

Kloof, South Africa

Dear Vireya Vine,

December 1997

I believe that good drainage is of paramount importance when growing Vireyas. I grow them on sloping ground, and as a further protection, I raise them above the level of the soil.

We make a small enclosure for each plant about 3 foot square with logs. We then fill up to the brim with a very loose mixture of shredded pine bark, rough material from the compost heaps, and woodland soil. We never fertilize Rhododendrons, but mulch them with dead leaves, twigs, and coarse compost to keep the roots cool and moist. The open nature of this mulch allows water and air to reach the roots, and makes it easy to remove weeds.

We grow Vireyas under evergreen trees, as many varieties suffer burning of young leaves if exposed to our tropical sun. Moss grows natural under the trees, and when the logs decay the moss grows over them, so that eventually each plant is growing on a small smooth mound of velvet green moss – a very beautiful effect. At this stage we dispense with the mulch, because the Rhododendrons look so beautiful growing in the moss.

There is no doubt that the appearance of Vireyas can be much improved by pruning, unless they are compact varieties. However, I have not done this, as I wish every variety to grow naturally as it pleases, so that when it is mature I can evaluate every plant on its merits.

I collected a very superior form of *R. javanicum* V. *brookeanum* on Mount Kinabalu, Borneo, which I named "Kinabalu". As I hoped, it is a fine parent producing seedlings with large symmetrical trusses in flaming colours. Hybridizing is fascinating, so much so that I am still making new crosses at the age of 86, and expect to continue for years to come.

Yours faithfully,

Leslie Riggall

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From Frances Plunkett  
Dear VV.

Washington DC  
January 1998

I have been enjoying a new acquisition, 'Vireyas A Practical Gardening Guide', by John Kenyon and Jacqueline Walker. Great pictures! And although it's a New Zealand book, growers elsewhere have obviously been kept in mind.

The authors make two comments about fertilizers: (1) that unlike other Rhododendrons and Azaleas, Vireyas are intolerant of acid plant food (P. 41); and (2) plants that spend part of the year indoors seem to do best with liquid, rather than granule, feeding (P. 61). I'd be interested to know the experiences and views of other Viners concerning fertilizer.

Frances Plunkett

1105 D St. SE  
Washington, DC 20003

*Well, Viners??? Fertilizers ????*

From Don Smith  
Dear Vireya Vine

Tidewater, Oregon  
February 1998

I have just five Vireyas so far and grow them in a greenhouse where the temperature ranges from 40 to 80 F. Cymbidiums have done well there and their requirements are very similar. In the year that I have grown Vireyas we were seldom without a flower.

My greenhouse experience has been mainly confined to orchids, which I have grown for 25 years. I am looking forward to hybridizing Vireyas and growing plants from seed – something that was just too difficult with orchids (orchid seed requires sterile transfer techniques and culture).

Our location here is about 10 miles inland from the Oregon coast. The climate is decidedly maritime and Rhododendrons seem to love it. With the mild climate, slightly acidic spring water and plenty of TLC, I have great plans for my Vireyas.

Don Smith  
PO Box 13  
Tidewater, Oregon 97390

*District #5 (California Chapters) of the American Rhododendron Society has sent in a check for \$100 to encourage another color page in the Vireya Vine. Fran Rutherford and I are thinking and working on that project. Thanks a lot. Your support is really appreciated.*

*The Rhododendron world lost Cecil Smith on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1998. Cecil was a kind and gentle man with a great garden near Portland, Oregon. Even though he was not a Vireya person he contributed much to the Rhododendron world over many, many years. RIP, Cecil. You will be missed.*

*I am always looking for ideas to make the Vireya Vine more interesting for our readers. The issue after this one (VV54) will be devoted to "People who have made a difference" in the Vireya World. But I need everyone to pitch in. Write what you know about someone. It really is quite a long list. And remembering these people is important. I will try to make up a list of names for the next issue to start from. E. White*

## **VIREYA NURSERIES**

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Catalogue is \$2.00 (Mail Order)

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**Te Puna Cottage Gardens (John Kenyon)**  
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**Bill Moyles - Vireya seed exchange 4243 Norton Ave., Oakland, CA 94602-**

Bovees Nursery has a Home Page on the INTERNET. [www.bovees.com](http://www.bovees.com) To find these spots search for rhododendrons or maybe even try vireyas. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has a good Home Page up with lots of information.

Are you selling or giving away Vireyas or even cuttings? Let us know and we will list you.

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